

# THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT IN WOMEN

A Jungian Approach

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*About the Author*/Helen Luke came to the United States from England in 1949. She had studied Jungian psychology in London and Zurich, and worked as a counsellor in Los Angeles for many years before founding, with three friends, a center called Apple Farm in Three Rivers, Michigan, for people who were seeking to connect their daily lives with the reality of myth and symbol. At age sixty she began to write in response to requests for written versions of the material used at Apple Farm. One book and two booklets have been published: *Dark Wood to White Rose: A Study of Meanings in Dante's Divine Comedy* (Dove Press, Pecos, New Mexico); *The Way of Woman: Ancient and Modern*, a commentary on three women who appear in the works of J.R.R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis, and Charles Williams; and *Through Defeat to Joy*, an essay on Williams' novels. The two latter are obtainable from Apple Farm.

The present pamphlet was written out of concern for the need of women today to regain a true understanding of the nature of the feminine—a need which the author has found almost universal in her work with the many women who come to Apple Farm.

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*You call yourselves free? Your dominant thought  
I would hear and not that you have escaped from  
a yoke. Are you one of those who had the right to  
escape from a yoke? There are some who threw  
away their last value when they threw away their  
servitude.*

NIETZSCHE

*Thus Spake Zarathustra*

# I

## THE SPIRIT AND THE ANIMUS

WHAT is meant by the word "spirit"? There are a thousand answers, but the true meaning is glimpsed by us only through the kind of experience that can never be rationally explained in words. Only the images which perennially emerge from the unconscious of mankind may convey in a symbol the power of the spirit.

The most universal of all the images of the spirit is the breath, the wind—the *pneuma* in Greek, the *ruach* in Hebrew; it is that which "bloweth where it listeth and no man knoweth whence it cometh and whither it goeth." Closely related to this is the image of fire. Out of the wind came fire, the ancients believed. At Pentecost there came a rushing mighty wind and tongues of fire burned on each individual apostle. This wind, this fire of the spirit, must enter into a man or a woman before he or she can in truth be said to *create* anything at all. Thoughts and actions that remain untouched by this mystery may produce new forms in abundance, bringing good and evil in equal measure to our collective life, but nothing is essentially changed in the psyche of man, whereas, whenever a breath of that wind or a spark of that fire lodges in mind or heart or body, we are immediately aware of some kind of newness of life.

If we look briefly at the various contexts in which the word "spirit" occurs, from chemistry to the Christian Trinity, we see that it is predominantly used on every level and without any moral connotation to express that which brings about a transformation. Oil is transformed into power through the spirit in petroleum; spirits of salt and spirits of ammonia burn and



cleanse, purify or destroy; the spirit in alcohol lifts a man out of his ego and alters his personality before our eyes; angels or demons have always been invoked to work transformations for good or evil; the spirit that emerged at Pentecost ran like fire through the pagan world and gave birth to the new Christian era. And, greatest symbol of all, the Holy Spirit in the God-head entered into a woman and transformed God himself into incarnate man. It is obvious from all this that the spirit basically manifests itself to Western man as an active principle, and therefore it has usually been associated with masculine creative power, though its feminine aspect has been known as Sophia, coexistent with God before creation.

Certainly it is fundamentally androgynous. But for most of us, having emerged to some degree from the original identity of archetypal opposites and being still far indeed from their conscious reunion, the paramount need is for discrimination between them. For until they are fully experienced as separate they cannot unite in a holy marriage any more than two married people can achieve a conscious relationship until they know themselves as psychically separate. Therefore for the moment let us call the spirit "he" in accordance with our tradition.

One of the loudest complaints of the liberators of women has been that the dominance of the male in society has prevented women from proving that they are as creative as men. This is a half-truth, whereby the real truth of the matter is obscured and lost. The first essential, surely, in thinking about the transforming power of the spirit is to remember that it creates nothing in a vacuum. There has to be fuel before the fire will burn; there has to be earth as well as seed, before new life is created. The masculinity of the spirit is meaningless unless it enters into a feminine container, and ultimately no man can create anything without the equal participation of the woman without or the woman within. Even God could not transform himself into man without the free consent of Mary. In every creative act or

transformation—intellectual, emotional or physical—the male and the female, the active and the passive, are of equal importance, and real liberation from the weight of the inferior status imposed on women lies not in the reiterated assertion that women must now strive to live like men, but in the affirmation, so difficult for us, of the *equal value* of the specifically feminine. Nothing demonstrates more clearly the real damage which has been done to us by the dominance of masculinity for so many centuries as the contempt for the feminine implicit in so much of the propaganda of the women's movements. It even creeps unrecognised into the work of some of the most far-seeing women writers of today. Indeed it requires a great effort of consciousness in every individual woman to remain aware of this destructive spirit which is constantly whispering to her the collective judgement of centuries about the inferiority, the dullness, the uncreativity of her passive feminine nature. Modern woman must therefore face the great danger of assuming that she has only to throw off the "yoke" imposed on her by men, and develop her "spiritual" gifts in the spheres of activity now opened to her, in order to arrive at that far-off goal of androgynous being.

The great contribution of C. G. Jung towards the restoration of feminine values to Western man is often obscured by a misunderstanding of his concept of the "animus." In Jung's terminology the animus is a personification of the *unconscious* masculinity in women, the anima being the parallel image of the feminine in a man. Being unconscious it is necessarily projected<sup>1</sup> and often manifests itself in negative ways, and this has been interpreted entirely out of context by many of those who are devoted to the cause of liberation. Jung, they say, denies to woman any equality with man. He accuses her of producing second-hand opinions and engaging in all manner of

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<sup>1</sup>Projection means a throwing out. Psychic contents of which we are unconscious are inevitably experienced as existing outside ourselves in some other person or fact of the environment.



inferior masculine activity, as though she were by nature incapable of real creativity. Nothing could be further from the truth. What Jung does affirm is that the creative power in a woman can never come to fruition if she is caught in an unconscious imitation of men or identification with the inferior masculinity in her unconscious. He defined the masculine as the ability to know one's goal and to do what is necessary to achieve it. As long as the animus remains *unconscious* in a woman he will persuade her that she has no need to explore her hidden motives and will urge her to a blind pursuit of her conscious goals, which, of course, liberates her from the hard and undramatic task of discovering her real individual point of view. Unrecognised and undifferentiated, he will actually destroy in her the possibility of integrating her contrasexual powers. Her spirituality will thus remain a sterile thing and this negative animus will poison her attitude to her own nature. The true function of the animus is to act as an inner guide between the ego and the deep springs both of the spirit and of true feminine wisdom so that the woman may bring to birth a new consciousness of both. It is when he operates *between* her and the outer world, and she identifies with him, that he destroys her creativity. Esther Harding quoted Jung as saying in conversation that the true feminineness of the man is *not* the anima; likewise the true masculine spirit in a woman is *not* the animus, though he leads her to it. The conscious integration of her dormant spirit of clear discrimination alone can free the individual woman from the compulsive yoke of the negative animus. Without this freedom no amount of liberation in the outer world can do more than throw her into another and more dangerous slavery.

The spiritual life is generally understood to mean the interior awareness which leads humanity into relationship to God, the Creator. The danger of mistaking an experience of spirits for the experience of The Spirit has always been recognised by the wise. "It is not every spirit, my dear people, that you can trust;

test them to see if they come from God" (Jerusalem Bible, I John 4:1). But this danger is greatly magnified in a time such as ours when every kind of experimentation is encouraged and promoted. It threatens a far greater number of people who are incapable of discrimination, and who, since they have been largely deprived of the rituals and collective symbols by which their souls were unconsciously nourished, seek everywhere to rediscover a numinous sense of meaning in life. Charismatic movements, and mystical or occult teachings of all kinds, spring up to meet the need of thousands who have lost contact with the spiritual in the deserts of materialistic rationalism. Groups come together to induce contact with what is all too easily called the holy spirit. Often there is simply an opening up of the unconscious which releases an experience of the numinous. Whether or not such an experience leads to a real glimpse of the transforming power of the spirit depends on the degree of awareness in the individual, and on the objectivity and humility with which she brings her vision to incarnation in her life on this earth. For the most part, these induced experiences are at once seized upon by that ambivalent pair—the anima and the animus—and the transformation remains on the level of the emotions or the will-to-power in the ego. People are then possessed by a hubris which heralds catastrophe.

How then are we to test the spirits? An illumination comes when we realise the extraordinary rightness of the name *holy* spirit—the spirit of the *whole*. The writer of the epistle of John, exhorting his readers to test the spirits, went on, "You can tell the spirits that come from God by this: every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God" (Jerusalem Bible, I John 4:2). In modern psychological language this is to say that we are justified in speaking of the spirit of God only when it leads to an incarnation in us, however small, of the spirit of truth within. This is the spirit that speaks through the *daimon* of each man or woman, calling



the individual to the fulfilment of his or her unique task. On the other hand, if, when the emotion of a numinous experience is spent and the darkness returns, we simply fall from exaltation to depression; or, worse, if we find ourselves so inflated by it that we at once set out to convert others, we may be sure that we are simply possessed by the "spirits" of the undifferentiated opposites in the unconscious. The true experience is always a sacrifice of the ego's one-sidedness; it is a reception of the creative seed into the vessel of the feminine, whether in man or in woman, and usually the beginning of a long nurturing, a patient waiting for the hidden birth. "Be it unto me according to thy word."

## II

### WOMAN AND THE EARTH

It follows from the preceding reflections that before a woman can safely pursue her goals with the true masculine discrimination that will bring her to maturity, she must first learn to recognise and to value the nature of the principle which is dominant in her by the fact of her sex. I am not denying the obvious truth that there is a great difference in the balance of the male and female elements in each person, but, whether the difference is great or small, nature tips the scale at our conception one way or the other, and no growth or transformation is ever possible until we have accepted the facts.

In innumerable counselling situations the tragic alienation of women from their femininity becomes clear. Very often the first extremely difficult task for the modern woman is to recognise her conscious and unconscious delusions about the nature of womanhood, so that she may begin to realise the extent to which her secondhand thinking is in collusion with

her repressed shadow qualities, directing her behaviour and even possessing her soul. This alienation must bring with it a sense of deep guilt, since it is a betrayal of one's own birthright, and this guilt is felt in all the wrong contexts and is sometimes accompanied by a sentimental religiosity in which the spirit of Christianity is lost indeed. The neuroses which result are often the saving grace because of the suffering they bring; they are a true operation of the spirit striving to awaken the woman to her predicament.

Often such a woman will reveal at once that her concepts of what it means to be a woman are concocted from notions of frivolous, emptyheaded pleasure seekers pursuing sexual goals, plus an image of the dependent drudge condemned to sweeping floors or to a boring twenty-four-hour-a-day care of children. Half-consciously it all adds up to a choice between whoredom and slavery, though she may not define it in this way. The first she despises, the second she fears, or vice versa, and thus she is miserably caught in an interpretation of womanhood as a choice between using men or being used by them. Yet the instinct of the feminine is precisely to *use* nothing, but simply to give and to receive. This is the nature of the earth—to receive the seed and to nourish the roots—to foster growth in the dark so that it may reach up to the light.

How are women to recover their reverence for and their joy in this great archetype of which the symbols have always been the earth, the moon, the dark, and the ocean, mother of all? For thousands of years the necessity of freeing consciousness from the grip of the destructive inertia and from the devouring quality, which are the negative side of the life-giving mother, rightly gave to the emerging spirit of activity and exploration an enormous predominance; but the extremes of this worship of the bright light of the sun have produced in our time an estrangement even in women themselves from the patient nurturing and enduring qualities of the earth, from the reflected beauty of the silver light of the moon in the darkness, from the

unknown in the deep sea of the unconscious and from the springs of the water of life. The way back and down to those springs and to the roots of the tree of life is likewise the way on and up to the spirit of air and fire in the vaults of heaven.

If we read the second sign of the I Ching, K'un the Receptive, which describes the Yin, the feminine principle, the equal and opposite of Yang the Creative, we shall find beautifully expressed there the essence of these things:

The Earth's condition is receptive devotion.

Perfect indeed is the sublimity of the Receptive. All beings owe their birth to it because it receives the heavenly with devotion.

. . . Seek not works but bring to completion . . .

To hide beauty does not mean to be inactive. It means only that beauty must not be displayed at the wrong time.<sup>2</sup>

The Receptive does not lead but follows, since it is like a vessel in which the light is hidden until it can appear *at the right time*. Thus it has no need for a willed purpose or for the prestige of recognized achievement.

Two warnings are added—the first is against the danger of inertia: "When there is a hoarfrost underfoot solid ice is not far off." The second speaks of the destructive results when the passive value takes the lead and *opposes* the active forces of Yang. It then produces real evil if held to. It may simply swallow up any new growth of consciousness.

If we can rediscover in ourselves the hidden beauty of this receptive devotion; if we can learn how to be still without inaction, how to "further life" without willed purpose, how to serve without demanding prestige, and how to nourish without domination: then we shall be women again out of whose earth the light may shine.

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<sup>2</sup>*I Ching*, Richard Wilhelm version, trans. Cary F. Baynes, Bollingen Series XIX (New York, 1967), pp. 386-390.



### III

#### THE ACADEMIC WOMAN

A friend confided to me the other day that she still suffered from guilty feelings because she felt incapable of producing *original* thoughts. These feelings came to her, she said, especially at moments when she had read a book of great creative originality to which she had felt an immediate response. She would ask herself why she was always able to follow but not initiate. Very few women who have grown up in this century are free from this brand of guilt complex in one form or another. To those of clear mind and differentiated feeling it may come in the manner expressed by my friend. In a great many others the guilt produces a positively compulsive desire to go to school—to acquire academic degrees—to own pieces of paper with printed evidence of achievements which will, they believe, prove at last that they are people of worth. As long as the degrees are necessary for a person's work or for a stimulus to expansion of the mind, it is well and good; but the drive very often has little or no relation either to practical necessity or to a genuine love of learning. It is found not only in those who have been deprived of opportunities for university education but frequently also in the well-educated and intellectually brilliant. It is a drive far more damaging to women than to men and much more often found in them because, although a man may feel cheated of opportunities if he has not been to college, his sense of worth as a person rarely depends upon it. But the acquisition of mental and rational skills appears to innumerable modern women as the only way to escape the sense of inferiority that besets them.

A highly intelligent and able woman told me that her fear of not achieving a doctorate was driving her into a state of neurotic anxiety which was affecting her whole life. She had a good marriage, children, a teaching job which she enjoyed and

did well and for which a doctorate was in no way necessary. Yet because the prestige attached to it seemed to her the only thing that could give her any real assurance of her worth, she was pouring a huge amount of her vital energy into research for her thesis. She could have explored her chosen subject without pressure and for the joy of it, once the desperate need for academic status was removed, but because of this imagined need the joy was of course lost. The anxiety thus generated, and the ever-growing resistance from the unconscious which made it harder and harder for her to write anything, was affecting her health and her relationships with family, colleagues and friends, and worst of all, it was progressively cutting off the springs of her sense of meaning in the unconscious. She had no time outwardly and no energy inwardly to be still and listen. Thus the earth and the water of womanhood in such a person is scorched and dried up by the destructive forces of fire and air. This may sound like an extraordinary and exaggerated state of affairs: on the contrary, it is very common among women with unusual thinking abilities.

The onset of severe neurosis in a woman of this quality of mind usually occurs, in my experience, when she is approaching the mid-point of life, and when she has already achieved considerable success in her profession. I knew one such woman who was a fine scholar and was also highly thought of as a teacher by both faculty and students. She had a good marriage and two young children; and to all who knew her superficially it would seem that the gods had indeed blessed her with every ingredient for a full and balanced life in which both her feminine eros and her masculine logos qualities could blossom. Yet when I first knew her she was suffering from neurotic symptoms so severe that her job was threatened and her children were obviously disturbed. She was subject to attacks of dizziness that would come upon her in the middle of her classes or while driving her car, and she struggled on with great courage as her fear increased. She began to explore

the images in her unconscious, and she soon recognised the recurring theme through dream after dream in which she sought desperately to establish a sense of identity and meaning in her life through the prestige of mental activity acceptable to examiners or academic gatherings of men. It also became very clear that what she was really searching for was a new religious attitude to life—in short, for the inspiration of the spirit, and that this spirit had become almost wholly identified with the pseudo-masculine activity of her animus.

She had in her youth been in true and living contact with the symbolic life of the Catholic Church, and through it she had been nourished inwardly. But for modern persons with a capacity for consciousness the old unconscious nourishment is not enough. If they are not to lose contact with the living water of faith and the flame of the spirit, each one must find these things individually as well as collectively through real self-knowledge and attention to her own spontaneous imagery. If an intellectually gifted woman does not set out on this path, gradually she is apt to fall a prey to the negative animus who so easily disguises himself as the true Logos. Unseen and unrecognised he takes to himself and uses as a weapon the mistrust and contempt for the feminine way, which surrounds us all. My friend had succumbed to this danger, and, although when I met her she was still trying to keep the spirit alive in herself by outer allegiance to her church, her interior life was growing more and more meaningless because of her alienation from her own truth and from the mystery of being. Very well, it may be said, if what she needs is a renewal of spirituality, let her turn to some strenuous spiritual discipline or charismatic group so that she may experience the "rushing mighty wind" or the sudden flame. Or others may recommend that she undertake some creative writing in her field which will bring relief to her anxiety about her value as a person and give a sense of meaning. But these things are in themselves no cure for such a condition; neither asceticism, forced meditation, short cuts to



the numinous, emotional release, or the foredoomed attempt to create out of a sterile soil can avail unless and until she finds and experiences what it means to be a woman.

As has been said, no one, either man or woman, creates anything without the co-operation of the contrasexual element, but when a woman of the kind I am describing tries to produce original work she goes at it, as it were, upside down. She starts from second-hand masculine thinking and is frustrated—even panic-stricken, when the feminine soil on which she is working refuses to come to life. And this situation extends into her whole life. She has then to learn to start from the receptive, the hidden, the goal-less aspect of Yin, and gradually the true light of the spirit will shine in the darkness, and the intellect too will be illumined and come to its fruition.

For a highly educated woman to learn again to trust that feminine kind of thinking, which Jung has called the natural mind, when once she has lost faith in it is an inner quest demanding indeed the "perseverance of a mare." In *Memories, Dreams and Reflections* Jung described the strange irrational appearance of the feminine natural mind in his own mother, and we feel the great importance of this in his boyhood years when he found in it nourishment for his own extraordinary early awareness of the two kinds of thinking. But once lost by the instinctive woman it is only reborn through a conscious and painful sacrifice. For my friend it took the form of a decision to resign from her fine university job for an unspecified length of time—to stay at home with her children, to dig in her garden, to apply her imagination and her discriminating powers outwardly in her cooking and housekeeping and in observing her daily reactions to her family—and inwardly by quiet attention to the images behind her life, which had for so long been ignored.

"What a comedown!" is the almost universal reaction to such a decision in this day and age. "Dr. So-and-so is wasting her great talents on work which any ignorant person can do," and

so on. The encounter with this lack of understanding brings with it the crucial experience, the cross without which there is no individuation, no rebirth into a new awareness of the meaning for which one was born.

My friend faced the misunderstandings, the hostility, the loneliness, and accepted the loss of that prestige which is the life blood of the negative animus. Support from a few she had. All have need of it from at least one at such moments, and it is always there if we have courage enough to face the vital choice. Perhaps only women who have made a similar sacrifice can fully appreciate the awful feeling of the loss of all known landmarks, the sense of failure, the fear of worthlessness, that comes to one who makes this choice.

I am not, of course, suggesting that all women with such a problem must make their sacrifice in this particular way. But in some form or other the break must be made—a defeat accepted—a loss of prestige endured, even if it is not recognised as such by others. I remember that Simone Weil wrote in one of her essays that an essential ingredient in the soul's journey through affliction was the experience of social rejection—and that whether this was suffered neurotically (to use our language) through projection, or in outer fact, was not important so long as the resulting affliction was fully accepted and endured—in which case, of course, the projection is finally made conscious and can be withdrawn.

At this point it is of interest to digress for a moment and look at the case of a man who had to go through a similar crisis—its similarities to the woman's predicament and the differences. In the case cited the neurotic conflict was evident in the long-continued inability of this intelligent and deeply religious man to write his doctoral thesis. All his studies were done; his notes were completed, but, the minute he sat down to write, a compulsive block took over and in agony of mind and heart he sought one escape after another. He had come at last to the final year of the permissible extensions of time; his sense of

inferiority was profound and he sought by sheer will and discipline to force himself to write; in his case there was a necessity to get the doctorate if he was to keep his job in a university in which he was greatly respected as man and teacher. He could not do it. For some time it had been obvious that the resistance was not in this man a mere weakness, as he had persisted in believing, but was a true protest from the unconscious. His *daimon* simply would not allow him to proceed along the royal road of a distinguished and safe academic career. He was, in fact, a priest, and his vocation was a spiritual not an intellectual one. But he could not pass straight from the one to the other. Suddenly he knew that the resistance was not a weakness and recognised it at last as a voice of the spirit speaking to him like Balaam's ass, standing in the way and refusing to let his master pass along a road which for him meant disaster. It had come to him not as a clear voice from on high, but from a stubborn donkey-like, totally irrational resistance working through the instinctive wisdom of his *feminine* unconscious. He too made a great choice. He resigned his job in spite of the well-meaning opposition of almost all and for two years or more he taught small children in a remote place.

So far the essentials are the same; the intellectual life had been substituted for the spiritual in both the man and the woman, as in countless others of both sexes. The immediate sacrifice was also the same—the giving up of a job which carried great prestige and security for an unknown future. The saving resistance came also from the same source—from the rejected feminine values of feeling and from the repressed natural mind which is without the goals of the conscious will. In this man's new work his energy was released from the hopeless struggle, his feeling qualities matured, and he had time and leisure to look within and search for the dominant thought in his life. He endured his spiritual conflict and found his vocation as priest which he had almost lost in those days of academic strug-



gle. With it his authority as a man emerged, whereas before he had been in many ways still a boy. Thereupon without any effort on his part the way opened for him, and all he had sacrificed was restored to him in a priestly instead of in an intellectual context. His prestige returned but he was no longer imprisoned in it or dominated by it. His spirit was set free to grow, nourished now by the earth of the feminine within him.

In the woman's case, however, the outcome was surprisingly different. Inwardly she made contact with her womanhood as he with his masculine strength, but she also discovered that, unlike the man, she did indeed have a vocation to the academic life. A woman with that kind of talent is usually born to develop and to live it. His resistance came from the straightforward fact that he had mistaken his calling and rejected the feminine values, and hers was the voice of her spirit crying out to her that she would fail altogether in her true calling as teacher and thinker because she was trying to follow it at the expense of her womanhood, in imitation of men, instead of allowing it to grow out of the earth of her feminine nature.

She, then, had returned to her "earth" as best she could. At first she felt clumsy, inept, moving in an alien element. Yet she persevered through all her doubts and consented with "receptive devotion" to employ her animus on work that brought no sense of achievement, to the making of those child-like pictures and fantasies, called by Jung active imagination, which seem to the rational mind entirely pointless. Most of all, outwardly she was helped by a suddenly discovered love of gardening, of planting and tending growing things. It is not to be supposed that the animus accepted all this lying down; he produced emotional storms and worked on her sense of failure with renewed vigor. But these affects were not merely negative. They forced her to remember and to affirm her calling to academic life and her need for it. But first she must endure the waiting and hide the light of her mind until the right time should

come. She was in "the service of the King," who is the Self, and who demands that we seek not works but completeness in our lives.

Thus, as in so many, the cause of the neurosis in both the man and the woman lay in their subjection to the collective contempt for the feminine way of "receptive devotion."

Marie-Louise Von Franz in her studies of the feminine in fairy tales points out how very frequently the way of the heroine involves a considerable time of withdrawal from the world, which for us means introversion, when she must go apart and endure the suffering of silent waiting for the time of her deliverance. Then comes the moment of a mature and conscious reunion with the hero, whose quest, in contrast, has involved vigorous action.

So it is within the individual. The woman had to wait for the return of her creative spirit. The time came when she felt ready to teach again. The many anxieties surrounding the work also returned to plague her, but she faced them now with far more detachment and acceptance. Then, unsought by her, came a suggestion that she apply for a position involving administration as well as teaching, and giving scope for all her exceptional qualities of mind and personality. It was time for the new light to shine. To this woman, as in the case of the man, the new opportunity came at the exact moment of readiness. The synchronicity is impressive; always it manifests when the spirit is truly at work.

Let it not be supposed that through any of our human transformations we are freed from our conflicts. The healing of a neurosis comes not from a removal of the conflicts that were its cause, but precisely by a realization of the reality of these conflicts and by a full and free acceptance of the suffering they bring. "All opposites are of God—therefore man must bend to their burden, and in so doing he finds that God in his 'oppositeness' has taken possession of him, incarnated himself

in him. He becomes a vessel filled with divine conflict.”<sup>3</sup> That which used to be so laden with guilt and pettiness is filled with meaning.

When she returned to her calling and took up this new and exacting work my friend had to face extreme pressures from outside and from her own insecurity, but she was now able to carry them by virtue of a fundamental change in her whole attitude to the receptive in life. She could now begin to “carry the outer world” and her own conflicts. Her reborn eros brought new warmth and acceptance into her relationships, and her teaching and work of leadership now sprang more and more from that response to meaning which *is* the creative gift of woman.

If women in work of an intellectual or administrative kind were to remember that their greatest contribution to this world of reason and logic comes from the feeling responses of their nature, much of the wreckage caused by personality clashes and neuroses could be averted. This does not mean that they are not to *think*. On the contrary, their thinking may well be of a particularly clear and incisive nature, because it springs from their own truth of feeling. Every good teacher knows that on her love for the subject she is teaching depends her ability to pass it on to others. Responding to her love with heart and mind together, she so recreates the subject that others in their turn may respond.

This brings us back to the comment about lack of original thinking in women. It is indeed easy for us all to fall a prey to this unconscious assumption that only original thoughts are worthy of being called creative, and so to lose sight of the truth that feminine originality lies in the capacity for unique individual *responses*, and that this is every bit as creative as the

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<sup>3</sup>C. G. Jung, “Answer to Job” from *Psychology and Religion: West and East*, Vol. 11 in *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, trans. R.F.C. Hull, Bollingen Series XX (New York, 1958), p. 416.



production of new ideas. This is the sure vocation of the majority of women; only the few are born to make new discoveries in the realm of ideas. Nothing can stop the genius of these few—Mme. Curie, for instance—but it is a real tragedy when so much is lost to the world by the efforts of finely endowed women to create in an imitative masculine way, instead of responding to the images either in herself or in the work of others, and so bringing fruition to her own creative spirit.

Is this “creative resonance,” as Jung called it, an *inferior* thing? A woman is not truly liberated until she knows its supreme value with her whole self.

#### IV WOMAN IN THE ARTS

It is an obvious fact that not only in the realm of thought but also in the arts there have been very few women of towering genius in comparison with men. We do not know what the future may bring, now that equality of opportunity is increasingly real and the weight of belief in the “proper” work of woman is lifted. There is of course already an enormous flowering of talent among women in every sphere, but it may well be that for as long as we still live in the dimensions of time and space where differentiation between the masculine and the feminine is the essential for consciousness, the number of women manifesting artistic and literary *genius* will remain small.

I hasten to add that this is not to say that the extraordinary influx of the spirit which we call genius comes more often to men than to women. Surely there have always been as many women as men in this rare category, but usually we do not see

the feminine genius because it does not often come to expression in an art or science but is at its greatest in the sphere of relationship. Even those who are most indebted to it are sometimes quite unaware of the unseen genius in mother or wife or friend which has created the atmosphere wherein their own spirits have been nourished and set free. So the "creative resonance of the feminine being" remains unrecognised.

It is significant that in the performing arts the achievements of women have equalled those of men. Names of superlatively great actresses, dancers, singers, come quickly to mind—Mrs. Siddons, Duse, Bernhardt, Pavlova, Jenny Lind, for example. In one branch of literature—the art of fiction—there have also been several women among the giants. But when we seek to name poets, painters or composers, the contrast is obvious. There are a number of fine women poets but, in the *supreme* category, after naming Sappho we pause to reflect—Emily Dickinson, Emily Brontë, perhaps and then? Almost no painters leap into memory and interestingly enough no composers at all, music being the most spiritual, the furthest from the earth, of all the arts.

Acting and dancing are in their essence arts of response and therefore peculiarly feminine. The artist becomes a vessel for the spirit of the character he or she represents, and this character is recreated by each great performer. The writing of fiction likewise depends on response, on the feeling for relationships between people and things. This kind of response is of course not at all the same thing as an instinctive reaction. On the contrary, only when the spirit of clear, discriminating intelligence fertilises her responses does the woman's re-creation of that which she receives from another become an act of individual genius. Christmas without a conscious response to the Annunciation is unthinkable.

The stature of an artist is rarely known in his or her own time, and anyway I am not competent to make any critical judgements. It is, however, certain that the creative spirit in

woman is everywhere expressing itself in the arts with great vitality and not least in the "grand art" of poetry. How much of this work will emerge as lastingly great we cannot yet know. Meanwhile the openness of all true artists to the collective forces in the unconscious always carries with it specific dangers for the ego, and I believe this to be particularly so for the creative woman when she is exposed to the collective pressures of the present almost universal demand for *publicity*. It is injurious enough to any artist, but for a woman it is a threat not only to her art but to the essence of her life.

I use the word publicity here in its widest meaning, not in the context of literary publication. One of the major psychological diseases today is the urge to make everything public; to keep anything hidden or secret is felt to be almost a crime. Emotions are evoked and expressed in large groups; mystical or spiritual experiences are shared with as many possible; workshops are founded in which people work publicly on the most private things; and statistics are collected with fervor so that all manifestations of the human spirit may be documented and publicised as indisputable truth. None of this is evil in itself. Man's urge to share his creative thoughts is an essential good, and the value of group activity and of statistics is without question. But the extremes, sponsored by those with genuine concern for humanity as well as by the media of our society, are largely destroying the sense of mystery itself and with it the essential value of the individual "secret," without which a man, and still more dangerously, a woman, loses contact with the soul. The individual soul cannot grow in public, for the kingdom of heaven is within and the prayer of the spirit is in secret. "Go to your private room, and, when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in that secret place" (Jerusalem Bible, Matthew 6:6). As it is with prayer, so with all creative work, which is, in fact, itself a form of prayer, being an individual expression of the mystery of being. The light which is born in secret will shine out when the time is ripe and be



seen perhaps by few, perhaps by many; the number is irrelevant.

Let us think of two women who were great poets and try to imagine what might have happened to them in our day. Both Emily Brontë and Emily Dickinson lived in extreme seclusion. They were withdrawn from the world; neither left home more than one or twice in the course of her life. Brontë's one novel and her few poems were among the undisputed masterpieces of the English language but she shunned even limited publicity. Jane Austen was at great pains to preserve her anonymity. Elizabeth Jenkins says in her biography of Jane Austen, ". . . whatever the motive which led her to refuse to enter society as an authoress, she was actually obeying a profound instinct of self-preservation . . . nothing would have induced her to accept a position, even in her family, in which she had to support a well-defined attitude or to be anything but the most ordinary of human beings; such a position would have been abhorrent to the conscious mind, and it would have threatened that capacity of vision that was the inspiration of her art."<sup>4</sup>

Dickinson's poetry remained relatively unknown until long after her death and her genius has only recently been fully recognised. She had a normal desire for her work to be appreciated and published if possible, but solitude and introversion were as essential to her work as to Brontë's; and in their own times, though they were not free in the outward sense, their inner freedom was actually protected—by the very limitations we most abhor—from the kind of struggle with the world which might have destroyed their spirits. Emily Dickinson wrote to her literary mentor, Thomas Wentworth Higginson:

I smile when you suggest that I delay "to publish"—that being foreign to my thought, as Firmament to Fin.

If fame belonged to me, I could not escape her—if she did not, the longest day would pass me on the chase—and the

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<sup>4</sup>*Jane Austen: A Biography* (London, 1938), p. 363.

approbation of my Dog, would forsake me—then. My Barefoot-Rank is better.<sup>5</sup>

It is not, of course, the fact of publication that kills, but the attitude of our world towards it. How fortunate that her literary adviser did not understand her! In an article in *The Saturday Review of Literature* (April 19, 1975) Edward Lucie-Smith has said that poets are no longer judged by their work but by the sensational events of their lives. Suicide is becoming to the public the exciting thing about Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, and others.

Thus their poetry, he says, itself becomes interesting only secondarily. Any true poet would despise this sort of thing as far as his conscious attitude is concerned; but it is a grotesque extreme arising from the universal climate of our society, a climate in which the feminine qualities wither and die because nothing is judged valuable unless it is known to and approved by large numbers of people. No one remains unaffected by this climate, but most vulnerable of all are surely those very sensitive girls and women in whom there lives the spirit of potential artistic creation, and who are forced too soon into the fierce struggle for public applause. Edward Lucie-Smith ends his article with the thought that poets need the courage to say "no" to publicists and admirers. These are every bit as threatening as the old attitudes against which they protest with such vehemence. The words of Emily Dickinson deeply heard restore the balance as they affirm the silent integrity of the individual creative truth.

Fame of Myself, to justify,  
All other Plaudit be  
Superfluous—An Incense  
Beyond Necessity—

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<sup>5</sup>Quoted by Thomas H. Johnson, ed., *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson* (Boston, 1960), p. vii.



Fame of Myself to lack—Although  
My Name be else Supreme—  
This were an Honor honorless— (713)  
A futile Diadem—

—*The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*

Art is born inevitably of conflict, and the outer life of the creative genius is often tragically disordered and imposes great suffering on those close to him or her. As Jung has suggested in discussing psychology and literature,<sup>6</sup> it is probably a matter of the energy which the spirit demands of one whose life is seized upon with such urgency that he must be true to his genius even if he has nothing left for other tasks and for human obligations. The one thing forbidden is the betrayal of his gift. Only the greatest of the great become complete individuals as well as supreme artists, while in this world. Shakespeare was assuredly one—Dante, Blake, and Goethe, perhaps. We are concerned here, however, with the many of lesser talents, especially the women, who, however superficially “free” their lives, are enslaved by the terrible pressure of the will to *do* which kills the creative genius of the feminine and hands it over to the negative animus and his pursuit of prestige or of the shocking and spuriously original. It may be, however, that the tragic lives and psychic suffering of such devoted women are the offering which will eventually re-awaken us to the values of the small, the secret, the hidden feminine muse which can produce a Brontë or a Dickinson. The conventions of society no longer protect such a one. The collective container of the family is lost and there can be no looking back, no retreat behind outer walls. We move forward to a new and challenging task—the discovery by each individual of the hidden vessel. Thus the woman poet may receive into the soil of her feminine earth the fire of the spirit and may know “the masculine and

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<sup>6</sup>*The Spirit in Man, Art, and Literature* Bollingen Series XX, Vol. 15 (Princeton, 1971), p. 102.



violent joy of pure creation." This is a line from the last stanza of the beautiful poem, "My Sister, O My Sisters" by May Sarton, in which she writes out of her great feminine wisdom of all these things. May we remember, whether we are artists or no, that retreat from the great spirit is far more likely in our day to take the form of a busy display of pseudo-masculine activity than of regression to the conventional femininity.

Every one of us, as we look back, must feel immense gratitude to those impassioned fighters whose individual *daimons* have made them spearheads of the great affirmation of freedom which has broken our collectively enforced servitude to the so-called feminine roles, and is giving us equality of opportunity in every field of human endeavor. We are paying a very high price for freedom, but it cannot be evaded, and there is no remedy in a regressive renewal of the old sanctions.

Therefore every individual woman who is capable of reflection and discrimination, and who lays claim to freedom, carries a responsibility to ask herself, "What kind of free spirit is it that breathes through me and is the dominant influence in my life?" To discover this is a task of self-knowledge which demands all the courage, honesty, and perseverance of which we are capable, and we have first to realize that real freedom from servitude comes only when one is capable of freely chosen *service*. We are freed from the "law" by which we have hitherto lived only through the choice of another binding commitment. We may do what we will only when we have learned the nature of love.

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